Programs and Services

Farm and Food Report, Week of February 20, 2006

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Week of February 20, 2006

SOILS AND CROPS CONFERENCE OFFERS AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FINDINGS ON A PLATE

If you are looking for the latest developments in soils and crop issues in agriculture—and technical details are something you never get enough of—this may just be your kind of thing.

The Soils and Crops Conference taking place at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan on March 2 and 3 promises to quench your thirst for knowledge.

Adrian Johnston, Northern Great Plains Director with the Potash and Phosphate Institute of Canada (PPIC) in Saskatoon, helped to organize this year's program.

"This is an event that we put on annually with the assistance of the Extension Division at the University of Saskatchewan," he says. "It is intended mostly for researchers and agricultural practitioners in the field, and it is a great opportunity for graduate students to deliver research papers, but it is certainly open to the agricultural producer community as well. Many of the presentations will have practical applications that crops advisors can take home; others will set the direction for future research on soils and crops in the years to come. It is basically an update on crops and soils research and development activities in Saskatchewan."

The format of the conference is typical of the academic milieu, with 20-minute concurrent presentations on anything from forage opportunities, fertilizer futures and organic trials, to the search for new herbicide chemistries or strategies to improve crop recovery of manure nutrients.

"We also have some invited speakers who are allocated half-hour sessions. They will include experts like Penny Pearse, the Provincial Plant Disease Specialist at Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), and Les Bohrson, a senior agrologist with SAF who works with irrigation resources."

There are also people likeSaskatoon commodity analyst Larry Webber who will share his perspectives on farm income and returns.

The Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists (SIA) and the Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) programs recognize this event as a professional development opportunity.

The registration form can be downloaded at:

http://www.extension.usask.ca/ExtensionDivision/noncredit/AFH/agriculture/soilsandcrops.htm

To register, call: (306) 966-5539.

For more information, contact:

Adrian Johnston
Northern Great Plains Director
Potash and Phosphate Institute of Canada
Phone: (306) 652-3535
ajohnston@ppi-ppic.org

Grant Wood
Extension Division
University of Saskatchewan
Phone: (306) 966-5586
grant.wood@usask.ca

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ZEHNER COUPLE'S RETIREMENT PROJECT YIELDS PROFITS

Duane and Margaret Rose's Shepherd's Cottage Wool may have started out as a retirement project, but it is turning into an agricultural success story for the sheep wool industry in Saskatchewan.

"We originally started to look for an animal that was raised specifically for the fibre. We found information on Shetland sheep, and as it turned out, there was a flock at Fort Qu'Appelle that would be for sale in the next few years, and we eventually acquired it.

Shetland sheep are unique in a number of ways. They are a small, primitive breed, but the wool is very nice to work with, explains Margaret. It can be of 11 different colours. The Roses have Shetland sheep that are black and grey, and light grey and white, and brown, and light brown and very dark brown.

"It is quite a marketing asset to have the natural colours," explains Margaret.

From their initial 19 ewes, the Roses now have 85. The purebred Shetlands are being registered with the North American Shetland Sheep Association (NASSA).

"We shear them each March," explains Margaret. "They quite enjoy it because they start getting really warm with a year's worth of fleece on them. This can be quite a long fleece in the Shetland—six to eight inches. In the last few years, we have been breeding for shorter fleece because the mills have a hard time working with the long fleece. The long fleece is good for people who like to hand process the fleece or hand spin it.

"When we had only a few sheep, I did some of the processing myself—that means washing the fleece, picking and spinning it, but now we send it to a fibre mill to be processed. They turn it into either yarn or into spinning fibre called roving, and then the yarn is sold as either knitting or weaving yarn. The best way to add value to it is to turn it into finished product. Hand knitting, as you can imagine, is not a speedy process. So it takes quite a bit of effort to knit a sweater, but I do have knitters who knit for me."

At Shepherd's Cottage Wool, the farm retail shop, the Roses sell wool products from their sheep that include yarn, spinning fibre and the finished products like sweaters, mitts, hats, scarves, slippers, socks and other things.

"We also sell knitting-related products, such as spinning wheels, knitting needles, knitting bags, knitting baskets and carders," Margaret points out.

Her husband and business partner Duane is quite proud of Rose Farm's accomplishments.

"We are pretty much self-sufficient in that we grow our own grain, barley or oats. We have grown field peas in the past, as well. We have our own hay field and our own pasture—we own a quarter section. So we have a place for the sheep for summer and winter. We have several barns and corrals to manage them and the equipment to do all this, to put up the hay and harvest the crop."

After a rewarding career in education, Margaret and Duane needed to undertake a project that would enable them to stay engaged in lifelong learning.

"Our parents were farmers," says Margaret. "We grew up around Swift Current, but we were living in Regina and looking for a way to get out of the city and to do something interesting. I always wanted to farm.

"We advertise in the tourism literature. People drop in during the summer time. We have an event at our farm called Country Critter Fibre Fair every September—this will be our third one coming up."

Duane proudly recites the list of other Rose Farm tenants. "We have two donkeys—we run them with the rams in the summer time. We have two llamas and we use them with the ewes. We have a livestock guardian dog and we are getting another, and we have a farm dog. Plus, we have our cats, and they are very important because without them, the mice just ruin our haystacks.

"The cats serve an important function. One summer we had just one cat and we lost about 1,000 bales. The mice just chew the strings off. We ended up just turning it into compost and spreading it on the field. Now we have good pest control officers."

According to Duane, the whole operation now pays for itself. "We actually do quite well at it. We don't have to buy a membership at the gym because we are forced every morning to go out and do chores. In the winter—in past winters, anyways—there is always snow to move and farm work in the summer.

"With the wool business—given the stage of life we are at," concludes Margaret, "we keep it manageable for us, first and foremost. I have gained enough experience that, if I were 30-something and had lots of energy, there are a lot of things we could do with the wool and the sheep. I see lots of potential."

Margaret and Duane Rose
Shepherd's Cottage Wool
Rose Farm
(306) 789-3763
rosefarm@sasktel.net
http://www.rosefarm.info/index.htm

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NEW AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY REQUIRES BETTER EQUIPPED BOARD MEMBERS

Organizations want to have productive and effective boards. They want to make the best possible use of the time and expertise of those who sit around their board table. The Saskatchewan Council for Community Development (SCCD) has recognized this need, and offers the Board Basics Workshop.

This workshop is now an approved course under the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) program, so those who qualify under the CASS program may be reimbursed for the workshop fee, according to SCCD community development co-ordinator Lisa Erickson.

"The Board Basics Workshop will be of interest to those involved with the boards of agricultural organizations and businesses. New agricultural and agri-food businesses and organizations will gain the information they need to thrive, and existing organizations will learn how to further strengthen the effectiveness of their boards."

Developing strong boards is vital for growth and leadership in the agricultural sector, explains Erickson. This workshop will equip board members, potential board members and staff who work with boards with the skills and knowledge to maximize their productivity and effectiveness.

The workshop is delivered by Donna Bruce and lawyer Sam McCullough. Bruce has 20 years of experience working with university, government and co-operative institutions. She is a consultant who guides people and organizations through strategic planning and leadership.

"Donna will handle the morning sessions, where she will talk about effective board practices and governance, while Sam takes over in the afternoon to cover the legalities and liabilities associated with boards," Erickson says. "Participants get a chance to spend a good part of the day with a lawyer and get their board-related questions answered. Often, many legal questions arise."

Past participants have included delegates from the Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, as well as livestock groups.

It is a one-day workshop. Included is a manual on effective board practices that participants get to take home.

The workshop takes place on March 8 at the Regina Travelodge Hotel. It runs from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The cost is $150, which includes coffee, lunch and a Board Basics manual.

A full brochure and registration form can be accessed at http://www.sccd.sk.ca/ by clicking on "Board Basics." For more information or to register, contact Lisa Erickson at (306) 975-5960 or e-mail her at: ericksonl@sccd.sk.ca.

For more information, contact:

Lisa Erickson
Community Development Co-ordinator
Saskatchewan Council for Community Development
(306) 975-5960
http://www.sccd.sk.ca/

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FORECAST SHOWS CONDITIONS RIPE FOR WHEAT MIDGE INFESTATION

Wheat midge populations are back at levels that could pose a significant risk to wheat producers in Saskatchewan.

The 2006 Wheat Midge Forecast Map indicates that densities of this insect pest have increased over much of the eastern half of the province, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Insect Pest Specialist Scott Hartley.

Wheat midge have been a serious problem for wheat producers since 1983, when they first appeared in Saskatchewan. This insect pest has gradually spread from the eastern half of the province to affect western regions, including North Battleford and Lloydminster. It has also expanded into Alberta.

"We had huge numbers during the late 1990s. In the early 2000s, the population was still high, but there has been a decline since, until now," Hartley says.

"For the past few years," Hartley goes on, "we haven't had very high numbers, which has moved the wheat midge off the radar as a serious pest. In the 2005 forecast, we started to note some higher populations of wheat midge again, largely in the south-east, but also northward along the Manitoba border. So we are back up to very serious infestation levels."

How these forecast maps are compiled is worth noting. Hartley explains that, in the fall, the survey is carried out by collecting soil core samples.

"The soil samples are washed; wheat midge cocoons are extracted and then dissected to check for parasite levels. Results show that, even after being corrected for parasitism, there are some high wheat midge populations, largely in the east central and south-east regions, and along the Manitoba border. It looks like midge will pose a reasonable threat to wheat producers across much of the eastern half of the province in 2006."

This rise in wheat midge levels can be attributed largely to climatic conditions that are more favourable to the midge, according to Hartley.

"This insect likes moist, cooler conditions. During 2001 to 2003, we had mostly hot, dry conditions that were probably responsible for the reduction of midge numbers. There are probably other factors, as well. For 2004-2005, the climate has been more conducive to a resurgence of the pest."

The 2006 forecast map is not very encouraging, although the forecasting techniques themselves are improving by leaps and bounds, notes Hartley.

A recent innovation is the identification of a wheat midge pheromone—a chemical that is released by a female to attract male midge. The research involved a joint project through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Saskatoon and Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

Hartley explains how this team has developed a monitoring system based on pheromone-baited traps set in the fields that would attract male midge and provide an indication of the prevailing midge levels.

"We are excited about this, as it is a positive step and an affordable tool for the future. The manufacturer, Phero Tech, is now working on establishing an economic threshold that could tell producers at what level spraying would be required."

Hartley advises producers who want to find out more about wheat midge identification and control to consult the FAQs on the SAF website or to call the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

Additional 2006 wheat midge forecast information, including the map, may be viewed on the SAF website under Crops/Integrated Pest Management/Insects.

For more information, contact:

Scott Hartley
Insect Pest Management Specialist
Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
(306) 787-4669

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SOCIETY FOR RANGE MANAGEMENT BENEFITING SASKATCHEWAN

As Saskatchewan agricultural producers increasingly turn to rangelands as a means to add value to beef, some people, like Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Forage Development Specialist Dale Weisbrot, hope that a greater number of range management interveners will become active in the Society for Range Management (SRM).

"It is a professional organization for folks directly and indirectly associated with range management in the larger sense: rangeland, forage development and forage use. Those are the people who carry out direct research and make recommendations in the province as to guidelines and policies that promote the wise use of rangeland and forage resources."

The society started in 1948, and is mostly made up of Americans, but it has a number of Canadian members, as well.

"In Saskatchewan during the last 10 to 12 years, we have paid a lot more attention to our range resources," says Weisbrot. "A number of range management professionals are working with landowners and land managers throughout the province to try to develop good, proper land management practices."

Range management professionals are employed by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, the University of Saskatchewan, non-governmental organizations like the Saskatchewan Forage Council, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, as well as the federal government through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's research arm and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA).

"Chances are, the next time you pick up literature or attend a seminar, tour or workshop that deals with pasture management and forage in general, an SRM member has been very involved in its development," says Weisbrot.

Some range managers have taken their professional certification through the Society, notes Weisbrot.

"They have obtained the Certified Professional in Rangeland Management (CPRM) designation. Once you have that, you embark on a continual learning process through regular personal and professional development.

"Normally, those who would become certified would be graduates of an accredited academic institution. There is a testing procedure where applicants can demonstrate their competence and receive the certification."

Rangelands comprise almost one-half of all the land in the world. They are extremely important to society for the goods and services they produce and for the ecological services they provide.

"The SRM is dedicated to the conservation and sustainable management of rangelands for the benefit of current societies, as

well as future generations," explains Weisbrot. "The Society for Range Management promotes international development, the dissemination of range management knowledge and the sound management of rangelands worldwide."

The SRM is organized by function through committees and by geopolitical and local functioning through sections and chapters. If need be, special task groups or partnerships can be established for a specific role from time to time.

"The SRM is divided in geographical areas that are subdivided into sections. We are in the Northern Great Plainssection, which includes Saskatchewan, Manitoba, eastern Montana and North Dakota," he explains. "Within that, we have the Prairie/Parkland chapter, which includes Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

"The organization is an active partner in the Saskatchewan Prairie Conservation Action Plan (PCAP), and takes part in the annual Native Prairie Appreciation Week by co-hosting a seminar and tour. This year's plan is to highlight the historic Matador and Beechy area on June 20 to 22. The SRM also administers the Gerald Sharpe Memorial Scholarship, which goes to a rangeland science student at the University of Saskatchewan."

The 59th annual meeting of the SRM just took place in Vancouver, British Columbia, on February 12 to 17. It is a major event attended by about 2,000 participants, and again this year had significant representation from Saskatchewan. Canada has hosted the annual meeting twice before, in Alberta.

The meeting features educational, technical and scientific programs and symposia that showcase the dynamics of range management and the interrelationships between the natural processes that form our diverse rangeland ecosystems.

Visit http://www.rangelands.org/srm.shtml to find out more about the Society for Range Management.

For more information, contact:

Dale Weisbrot
Forage Development Specialist
Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
(306) 787-9476

Canada

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